

amongst us, they are also very good eating. Clearly the impact of the Kestrel with the pigeon in flight had killed the pigeon instantaneously. The Kestrel left the dead pigeon momentarily, jumped onto a wooden half barrel containing earth, and began to clean its beak on the wood. At that point it saw us and flew off, leaving the dead pigeon on the ground. About fifteen minutes later another bird was seen through the kitchen window. This time it was a magpie that had alighted and begun to eat the dead pigeon. The magpie was encourage to leave, and the dead pigeon put in a polythene bag and hidden under a wood display under the overhang. The bag remained there until darkness fell. However it disappeared overnight. Presumably this was a fox or feral cat.

The kestrel incident, besides being extremely interesting in terms of an urban siting of a highland bird in the city, shows how top predators such as the kestrel, the magpie, and presumably a fox or cat, compete for meat in an urban environment. Interestingly enough, kestrels are now fairly common in Glasgow, and kestrels and sparrow hawks are known to nest on the University campus (personal communication - James Munro).

The second example is interesting because it is an interaction between a mammal and a bird. During October 1998 on the University of Glasgow campus, two magpies were observed attacking two squirrels. The attack developed as follows. The two magpies attacked a single squirrel in a nest on a whitebeam outside the West Medical Building on the main university campus. The nest was about 15 to 20 metres above the ground. The attack involved considerable noise, which first drew the attention of the observer to the event. The noise consisted of screeches and flapping wings. A second squirrel then appeared, apparently from the nest, and joined in the fray. The confrontation between the magpies and the squirrels lasted for about 15 minutes. The magpies eventually ceased attacking and flew off. The squirrels appeared to go back into the nest. The nest was probably a crows nest. The question is what were the squirrels and magpies fighting over, in other words what was in the nest? It is possible that the magpies were using the nest to rear their young, whereupon the squirrels were presumably attempting to prey on the young of the magpie. The other alternative is that the nest may have been used as a dray by the squirrels, in which case the magpies were attempting to prey on young squirrels, and the two adult squirrels were protecting their offspring. Neither alternative is entirely convincing, as autumn is not a time that is normally associated with the breeding of magpies or squirrels.

These two sets of observations on top predators and their activities in a city environment show how important aspects of an animal's predator/prey status can be easily recorded. They also provide good evidence of the way in which the species interact with each other, and indicate that much

research is needed on the role of animals such as these in urban environment.

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GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKERS FEEDING ON THE NECTAR OF RED-HOT POKERS

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During the warm and sultry weather experienced in early July 2001, A. & D. MacFadyen drew my attention to a family group of Great Spotted woodpeckers *Dendrocopos major* repeatedly visiting a tall clump of South African red-hot pokers *Kniphofia uvaria* in a west Stirlingshire garden. Both adults and a least one juvenile would individually alight on one of the rigid stems of the plant, just below the large flowering head. Binocular observations at close quarters showed that the woodpeckers were drinking droplets of nectar from the pendant perianth tubes of the open yellow flowers. Each bird would spend several minutes working its way around a flower head before moving on to the next, occasionally pausing to pick-off and eat an insect which had also been attracted to the feast. Subsequent enquiry produced a similar record of Great Spotted woodpeckers nectar-feeding on Red-hot pokers at Blackhall, Edinburgh, in the summer of 1999 (D. R. McKean, *pers comm.*)

Great Spotted woodpeckers drinking the sap oozing out of the bark of trees in spring are well documented in northern Europe (Cramp *et al.* 1985), but taking advantage of the availability of sugar-rich nectar from a cultivated herbaceous flower in summer is behaviour that appears to have been little observed in the species.

References

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HAECKELIAN RADIOLARIAN MATERIAL AND THE MICROSCOPICAL SOCIETY OF GLASGOW

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It is a pleasure to put on record the recent receipt of a box of historic microscope slides most kindly donated to the University Marine Biological Station